

OPEN FORUM

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Too much is too much

The school board approved a contract for 22,000 employees that grants a compounded average salary increase of 9.28 percent per year. The firefighters unions last two three-year contracts contained a compounded yearly increase of 11 percent. These are unsustainable hikes.

For the sake of comparison, the last three years of increases in Social Security payments were, 2.3 percent for 2008; 3.3 percent for 2007; and 4.1 percent for 2006. Social Security increases are based on rises in the cost of living. Does something seem to be out of balance here? We definitely think so.

In general, the wage and benefit agreements were far too generous and in view of the county's current dire financial circumstances those excesses must be corrected.

Max Bronstein, Silver Spring

The writer is active in several civic groups, however, he is writing as an individual and not as a member of any group.

Working with labor

I respect the contributions county employees make to the quality of life we enjoy in the county. But I can't in good conscience recommend to my colleagues on the County Council that they support a budget that puts an unfair burden on working families, seniors and the most vulnerable. That's why I asked union leaders if their members were given a choice between a reduction in COLA or involuntary layoffs, which option would they find most acceptable?

I believe most workers would agree that in rough seas, everyone needs to pitch in to get to the other shore. And just as important, lawmakers must stand on working families' side in support of those who are fighting for their fair share, looking for work or are least able to protect themselves in today's economy.

Duchy Trachtenberg, North Bethesda

The writer is an at-large member of the County Council. She also is chair of the council's Management and Fiscal Policy Committee.

Not a 'distraction'

The Gazette's April 30 editorial, "Seeing red over legislating green," takes aim at a measure that will ensure that new homes built in the county, beginning in 2010, are between 15 percent to 30 percent more energy efficient than they are today. It criticizes us for being "distracted" from our real responsibilities.

The council passed laws that address the major contributors to climate through a mix of incentives and mandates that will result in less energy being consumed and more renewable power being utilized. The package maintains the county's rightful place as a national leader in the environmental movement, promotes a green economy, and helps homeowners struggling with utility bills. This work is not a distraction from our real responsibilities — it is at the heart of our responsibility to foster a sustainable community.

Roger Berliner, Potomac

The writer represents District 1 on the County Council.

Primary lessons

There is a lesson to be learned in Don Praisner's victory in the County Council race in District 4: There has emerged an increasingly vociferous middle class anxious over the effects of traffic congestion, proliferating crime, environmental degradation, the threat to established communities from accessory apartments and other relaxation of building codes to accommodate affordable housing needs, and mounting infrastructure requirements and social demands that appear to be overtaking the county's ability to pay for them. Praisner's triumph tapped into that sentiment.

While declaring herself the candidate of "inclusiveness," Nancy Navarro excluded a large constituency of middle-class residents (both whites and blacks) concerned about crowded classrooms, high taxes and the undue influence of special interests in county politics.

Stuart Rochester, Birtonsville

The writer is chair of the Fairland Master Plan Citizens Advisory Committee.